

To put it simply, this man is too good to be saved. He needs to break a few Commandments. Maybe more than a few. He needs to become a wretched sinner. Only then will he have any hope of eternal life.

Jesus tries to help him. “*No one is good except God alone,*” He tells him. But the man insists: “I am good! *I’ve kept all these Commandments from my youth!*” And he probably is a great guy. The kind of person you would want for a neighbor. He wouldn’t defraud you, or steal from you. He would not spread lies about you, or hurt you in any way. More people should be like him. I’m serious. How much better wouldn’t our world be if everyone kept the Ten Commandments?

But no one does. *Only God is good.* But people disagree. This man disagrees. “I am good!” Then why is he coming to Jesus? What could he possibly want from Him? He’s not coming for salvation. He’s coming for information. “*Good teacher,*” he calls Him; not “Good Savior.”

This man, I’m quite certain, comes running up to Jesus because he has just heard Jesus say, in the verses before our text, that “*whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*” And this gives him quite a jolt. He has had no trouble sleeping at night because he is good. And so, he has never concerned himself with the remote possibility that he might not make it to heaven. But then he overhears Jesus, this respected teacher, say that everyone must become like a child to have eternal life, and suddenly he is concerned.

So, he runs up to Jesus. He doesn’t need saving; he needs more information about this *becoming a child thing*. He had assurance before. But now his assurance is wavering. He is not a child. He is nothing at all like a child. Children are needy; he is not needy. Children need to be cared for by others; he does not need any such care. Out of respect, he kneels down before Jesus, and he blurts out his question: “*What must I do to inherit eternal life? What am I missing? What am I lacking? I cannot become a child. So, tell me what can I do to gain eternal life?*”

And right there is the problem. Not just, “What must I do?” but that there is something he thinks that he can do. This man is too good for his own good. “I’ve kept all these Commandments. What else is there to do? Tell me what it is, and I’ll do it!”

That is not how a child thinks. Children, little itty-bity children have needs. They cannot feed themselves; they must be nursed by their mother. They cannot clean themselves; they must have their diapers changed and be given baths. It all begins with their birth. They do not bring themselves into this world; their parents, or better yet, God brings them into this world. And they come in with nothing. Everything must be given to them, and done for them. Children are needy. They must be cared for.

And this, says Jesus, is how we must be to enter the Kingdom of God. It is not something within our grasp. It is beyond our reach. Eternal life can only be received. And so, we must become children. Children can receive. That’s all they can do. To receive eternal life, we must become like children.

But this man can do it all. He is good. “I can do it, Good teacher; tell me what I must do to gain eternal life, and I’ll do it.” Okay, “*Sell all that you have,*” says Jesus, “*give it all to the poor...and come on, follow Me.*” Can he do it? No. He walks away sorrowful for he has great possessions.

What about you? Can you do it? Can you give it all away and follow Jesus? Do you need to give it all away? Has your wealth become your god? Jesus, nowhere in the Bible, tells you to give away all that you have and follow Him. He tells this man to do it because this man is lacking the most important thing of all. He does not have the true God. His possessions are his god. His own goodness is his god. He does not have, or need the true God. He himself is god with his own goodness and wealth.

You cannot give anything to someone who has it all. But you can give to someone who is in need. You can give forgiveness to a wretched sinner. You can give eternal life to someone who confesses that salvation is beyond his own reach; that he is like a child, and must receive all that is good from God.

Here is the truth, my friends. Jesus is eternal life. "*I am the Way,*" He says, "*and the Truth, and the Life.*" Anyone who does not have Jesus does not have eternal life. "What am I missing?" the man wants to know, "What am I lacking?" "*You lack one thing,*" answers Jesus, "*Give it all away and come on, follow Me.*"

This man lacks Jesus. He doesn't need Jesus. He has no need of anything; he is wealthy. He has no need for forgiveness; he is good. This man will never need Jesus unless he becomes needy. He will never follow Jesus unless he gives away his possessions. He will never come to Jesus for salvation unless he confesses that he is a wretched sinner.

Why are you here today? For the dinner? Maybe. But the dinner is downstairs. Why are you up here before God's altar? Jesus is here. This is His House, His Day, His Service of the Word in His Sanctuary. He is here for you. Is that why you are here?

If you are not good; if you are a wretched sinner, then you are blessed, truly blessed, because Jesus is your forgiveness, and He has become your salvation. He gave up all that He had for you, to follow after a cross for your sake. He is good, for He is God. But He suffered on that cross for you. He took your bad, your sin, all of it. He took the punishment you and I deserve. He died on that cross and He rose again from the dead. Jesus is, therefore, your *treasure in heaven*. He is your way to heaven. He is eternal life.

And that life He gives to you. Where? In your baptism. There is His promise; His promise that all your sins are forgiven; His promise that eternal life is yours right now.

One day you will give it all away. You were born into this world with nothing, and you will leave with nothing. But you will leave this world as God's baptized child, because your baptism never leaves you.

You should strive to be good. You should strive to keep the Ten Commandments. Yet your goodness is not in how well you live. For Jesus' sake God declares you to be good, holy, innocent. You have given everything away – all your sinfulness. Jesus took it from you. He forgives you. You, therefore, do not lack anything. You have Jesus, and He has you. Amen.